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THE CHINESE PRESS OF TO-DAY.

BY ARCHIBALD R. COLQUHOUN.

It is well known that Peking enjoys the distinction of being the home of the oldest newspaper in the world, beside which even such old-established journals as the London "Times" are mere mushroom growths. Although the "Peking Gazette" is not a news sheet in the modern sense, it has filled an important place in Chinese life; for, despite his ignorance of the outside world, the Chinaman loves to read and discuss the affairs of the day.

Long before the modern newspaper made its appearance in China, there was an extensive use made of placards, *pasquinades* and broad sheets, often extremely witty and clever, containing sarcasms on officials, even criticisms of Government, and generally used for the ventilation of popular wrongs and the expression of popular resentment. These were to be seen posted on walls in all the main streets and even on the gates of the *Yamen* (the mandarin's official residence), and nothing is more illustrative of the democratic constitution of China than the fact that Government never exercised any censorship over these forerunners of the modern press, and that there are actually no press laws in existence to-day. This is a curious contrast to the state of affairs in more than one Western country, and the United States is probably the only one where similar license is allowed. Japan, which is erroneously supposed to be China's model in the evolution of the press as in other things, has a very stringent and severe censorship. Notwithstanding some relaxation of press laws in 1897, the Japanese Ministries of Army and Navy have still the power to prohibit the sale or distribution of any paper disclosing military secrets, and that of Foreign Affairs has similar discretion with regard to any publication likely to bring about embroilments with any foreign Government. Insults to the dignity of the

Imperial Family or attacks on existing institutions can be punished, not merely by suspension and fines, but by imprisonment. Indeed, till lately, imprisonment was so common that most papers employed a "prison editor," or official scapegoat, whose business it was to undergo these terms. The real editor was treated merely as a "contributor," and thus escaped the arm of the law.

It must not be supposed, however, that the Chinese press enjoys complete independence. There are not merely acts but certain words which, when employed against the Imperial Family, amount in Chinese law to parricide, and to indulge in the latter a newspaper must take refuge in one of the treaty ports or in Hong-Kong. Chinese officials, too, are a law to themselves and can, and do, put editors in prison on occasion; but the position of an ordinary mandarin or official is not a very certain one. The possibility in China that any man may rise from the ranks, and from being oppressed become an oppressor, develops a general desire for peaceable adjustment of differences. The fear of the press is potent with officials, and they avert its criticism, as a rule, not by harsh treatment, but by subsidizing it. Sometimes the whole staff of a paper is on a sliding scale of pay from the local mandarins, but more commonly the bribe takes the form of subscriptions for a certain number of copies, which may, or may not, be delivered—a method not altogether unknown in the Occidental world. One special reason for the desire to stand well with the press is the existence of the body known as the "College of Censors," whose business it is to scent out abuses and report to the Throne on the incapacity or misconduct of mandarins. Even the Imperial Family is not free from their criticisms.

The first real newspaper on modern lines started in China was the "*Shên Pao*" (the "Shanghai News"), published under English auspices in 1870; it preceded the first newspaper in Japan (founded also by an Englishman), which appeared a couple of years later. Encountering considerable difficulties at first, the "*Shên Pao*" by degrees won a good position, and was the first paper to give leading articles on the European model and to comment seriously on public affairs. Other papers were later founded, on the model of the "*Shên Pao*," at other treaty ports and at Hong-Kong. The growth of the Chinese press was slow until 1894 (before the Chino-Japanese war), when, besides the old "Peking Gazette," there were not more than a dozen

native newspapers in the whole of China (including Hong-Kong), of which some three or four were published in Shanghai; one each in Tientsin, Foochow and Canton, and five in Hong-Kong. The issues of these papers were all inconsiderable. At this time, however, there were already eight Chinese magazines regularly published (in connection with missionary work), which, in many cases ably written and edited by foreigners, laid the foundation of further educational work. In 1898 (the great reform year), there were no fewer than thirty-five native newspapers, fifteen published in Shanghai, of which many had large circulations, and at this time there were also some thirty-five publications of the magazine class in different parts of China.

The *coup d'état* of this year put an end to many of these publications, which were the fruit of the reform movement and largely employed for the purposes of the reform propaganda; but, after the flight of the court to Hsi-an and the weakening of the reactionary party, newspapers and magazines began once more to reappear, and they are to-day two or three times as numerous as in 1898 and enjoy considerable and growing circulations. In addition, every province has now its official newspaper or *Kuan Pao*, which is the medium for Imperial edicts and for the publication of such official "news" as government may desire to make known. Without giving actual statistics, it may be mentioned that Peking, which had no newspaper up to the time of the Boxer rising—except a short-lived weekly started by the Peking Reform Club and suppressed by the Empress Dowager—has now three daily newspapers and two fortnightly ones, some of these being partly illustrated. Tientsin has at least three dailies, one of these, the "*Takung Pao*" ("The Impartial"), having the very respectable circulation of twenty thousand. The official organ, which calls itself the "Times" (the "*Shih Pao*"), although not so widely circulated, is well written under European auspices and has considerable influence. In Shanghai there are now sixteen daily papers (price, eight to ten *cash* each), some of which have circulations of as much as ten thousand, and besides these there are many journals published there. Further south (at Foochow, Soochow and Canton), there are in all some six or seven daily papers, and at Hong-Kong five, while Kiaochow has one which is supported by the local German government. In addition to these, several papers are now published in the interior, but the majority,

for various reasons, flourish in the treaty ports. Wherever the Chinese congregate abroad they have their papers; at Singapore there are three, at Sydney two, in Japan two, in Honolulu several and in San Francisco some half-dozen. It must be added that the improvement in the postal arrangements of China has brought the most remote parts of the Empire into touch with the coast, and that in places where no such thing had ever been seen papers and books are now making their appearance and are eagerly read.

Formerly the instinct of the press was to turn, in cases of official oppression or interference, to British protection, and the majority of the papers and other publications had their birth under British *aegis* in the treaty ports. It has been more than once suggested that the free use made by the native press of the privileges accorded to foreigners was little likely to promote good feeling between China and the outer world, to which she granted those privileges. Of late a different line has been adopted. Many of the papers are either nominally or actually owned by Japanese, or more frequently still controlled by them; and not only are they able to avoid giving offence by their superior understanding of Chinese idiosyncrasies, but, in case of offence, the fact of their presence protects the paper from the Chinese officials. It is, however, quite impossible to gauge the actual degree of Japanese influence on the Chinese press, owing to the varying character of their connection with it and the fact that their policy is never to obtrude the national note.

The papers are written in the classic, or "book style," language, which is understood throughout the Empire, and the personnel are usually disappointed office-seekers, many of them good, and sometimes even brilliant, scholars. The enormous number of the *litterati*, whose only hope after passing the examination portals is to obtain government positions, provides ample material for the profession of journalism, and the literary character of the papers is higher than that to which we are accustomed in the West. At the same time, it lacks the snap and vigor of modern "journalese," and it is only recently that even the up-to-date Japanese have been able to tear themselves from the elegancies and pedantries of the classic school and adopt a more concise and simple form of composition. In general character the Chinese press resembles that of Europe. There are leaders and leaderettes, news items, telegrams, scraps of general information and advertisements.

Along the top, where we are accustomed to see the title, runs the pious exhortation to "respect the written word," and the custom of reverently collecting and burning all printed matter still survives, although it is neglected in some of the treaty ports. Special correspondence is "conveyed" from the foreign press, and not always well translated, which leads to many ludicrous mistakes. The acknowledgment is made to a "Western Friend," and the leading papers have a foreigner to advise on foreign news, but some of the more advanced statesmen have men to translate direct to them, as had Li Hung Chang. Advertisements in the more popular papers are much in evidence, as in our own papers, and war news is given prominence. This is a modern development, for at the time of the Chino-Japanese war the defeats of China were never chronicled, but imaginary victories were dithyrambically described, and the same happened in some parts of China at the time of the Boxer movement. As a rule, the articles in Chinese papers and magazines are not signed, but the niceties of style are such that the authors are soon recognized locally; whereas, in Japan, the leading writers enjoy quite a national reputation. This does not imply that the Japanese pressman is well paid, any more than his Chinese brother, for the maximum salary of the former rarely exceeds a hundred pounds a year, and is oftener between thirty and fifty. The Chinese is even more poorly paid, which is some excuse for his system of blackmail; but, in fact, the whole theory of wages in China rests upon the universal custom of illegitimate perquisites.

The ownership of papers or their control is quite an understood feature of statesmanship in China and Japan, the oracle being worked more openly there than in our own candid West. Marquis Ito is credited with the control of one of the most influential papers in Japan. The use made of the Japanese press has been very skilful. At the psychological moments in diplomacy, expression of public opinion has been checked, or let loose, in a most effective and useful manner, and no untimely comments or indiscretions have been permitted to "embarrass the government." In contrast with this careful organization, the Chinese control has been ineffective. The late Li Hung Chang once had a startling evidence of this in his own paper at Tientsin. He had just put through a "deal" with an adventurer, who called himself Baron Mickiewitz. This man represented that he had the capital

of all the leading bankers of the United States at his back, and, succeeding in convincing Li Hung Chang of his *bona fides*, obtained from him something in the shape of a concession which was to confer control of all future Chinese railways. It was a peculiar transaction in which neither side had the power either to sell or to buy, and Li probably did not imagine that he was granting anything worth having. The *douceur* customary on such occasions was the one feature which he considered essential. The whole transaction was exposed before it was concluded in an English paper at Shanghai, and by an error of the native editor, who was "conveying" his foreign news, was bodily transferred to Li's own paper, where he read the denunciation of himself couched in most unmeasured terms. In the paroxysm of rage into which he fell, he desired nothing less than the heads of the editor and all the staff, but an ingenious European adviser restored peace by assuring His Excellency that the incident, if he took no notice of it, would only illustrate his own complete indifference to all criticism, and place him on a lofty plane where such unfounded rumors could not reach him. The effect of this attitude on the Court at Peking, it was gently insinuated, would be useful in case of any action on the part of the censors.

It is interesting to note that the influence of the modern Chinese press is in favor of reform, and that two distinct schools of opinion have grown up. One is headed by Kang-yu-wei, the arch-reformer and friend of the Emperor, who since 1898 has been obliged to take refuge chiefly in Hong-Kong, whence he continues to issue literature which has as its aim the wholesale reformation of China on the most advanced European principles. There has been, even in Japan, a party which favored this method of reform, and it was the key-note of the aspirations which cost the young Emperor Kwang-sü his liberty. Its wisdom is doubted by many who desire a regenerated China, but owing to the revolutionary spirit of Southern China it is sympathetically received there. The more moderate reform movement, which embraces no anti-dynastic programme, is headed by a man named Liang (also one of the fugitive Reformers), resident in Japan, who enjoys a reputation not only in China but in Japan as a writer and thinker. He follows the journalistic method initiated by Captain Brinkley in his paper, "The Japan Mail," which has had so powerful an influence on the reform movement in Japan, and is

moderate in suggestions and criticisms, deprecating haste or wholesale revolutions, because of the peculiar conditions of China.

The attitude of the press towards foreign affairs varies, naturally, with the nature of the inspiration behind it. The purely native papers are no more inclined to give a true perspective to world affairs than formerly, and, as has already been said, in borrowing their foreign news they frequently introduce imaginative emendations to the text. A very real and powerful movement has, however, become patent in the American boycott, which is largely stimulated by the press, and it must be remembered that the Chinese are easily inflamed by their reading. The action of the guilds and chambers of commerce, in connection with the boycott of American trade, shows a unity of purpose between the commercial class and the *literati* (who are the press) which is very significant.

One of the most interesting phenomena of modern China, largely due to the spread of journalism, is the introduction of modern subjects into the literary examination papers, and it would not be possible in an article on this subject to omit mention of a society which, while not forming part of the purely Chinese press, is still working on similar lines to increase the knowledge of the people. The "Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge," although largely supported by missionaries, has many lay adherents, both European and Chinese, and, by printing at its press in Shanghai some of the classics of Western Europe in the Chinese tongue, it is opening a new world of thought to the people. The statistics of this society are extraordinarily interesting as an index to the mental development of the Chinese. In 1904, they printed two hundred and twenty-four thousand copies of new books, and their reprints amounted to seventy-seven thousand. This by no means represents the total of European books circulated in China, since these publications are extensively pirated, all the best being seized upon as soon as published, photolithographed or set up anew in different type, and sold very cheaply. No less than six editions of one book were found in Hangchow at the same time, and the Society estimates that, at the lowest computation, their output is increased five times by piratical methods. The range of these books is very wide. Herbert Spencer and all philosophical works are naturally favorites, but the demand for such books as "Little Lord Fauntleroy" and "Handel's Mes-

siah" on the one hand, and for the "Review of the Times" or "Lives of American Presidents" and "Women in All Lands" (11,000 copies) on the other, shows a more catholic taste in literature than one would have expected. The great value of the publications of the society is that they are an antidote to the insidious propaganda which seeks to unduly elevate Japanese civilization, as distinct from its European prototype, and correct the superficial view of such matters gained by Chinese in their colleges or in Japan.

While Europe and America must acknowledge that they were in certain respects unsuccessful in their attempts to rouse China from her centuries of sleep, and that the example, as well as the precept of Japan, is having a greater effect, yet both Chinese and Japanese need to be reminded that without the West the Far East would still be dormant. The Chinese press, now so largely dominated by Japan, was initiated by Europe, and the high-class popular literature of the day is also almost entirely Occidental in its origin. The testimony of Chinese themselves to the influence of this literature is of great interest, and it should spur all those who do not like to see human effort wasted to help the society which is diffusing this literature. A greater danger threatens Christian and Occidental influence in China than any mere persecution of foreigners, and it threatens to destroy the careful work of years. It is not in any feeling of antagonism to Japan that one should desire to strengthen Western influence in China, but because the present problem before the progressive Chinese is being stated to him unfairly. He should know what our civilization and religion and philosophy are before he rejects them finally. Japan, having wisely reformed herself on Western lines, retains her Oriental heart. This may be possible for China, or it may not. In any case, through press and through literature let us do our best to give her a true perspective. When we remember what power this rapidly growing press and literature have over the vast population of China, and what that power may grow to be; when we remember that our own press and literature are the models and the sources of inspiration, and that the attitude of Great Britain and the United States is eagerly watched and commented on in hundreds of these papers and publications, we shall, perhaps, realize more clearly our own responsibility.

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